



**J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo, Esq.**

Director, New Jersey Division on Civil Rights

Office of the Attorney General - Department of Law and Public Safety

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J. Frank Vespa-Papaleo serves as Director of the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, and as such, is the state's lead anti-discrimination officer responsible for ensuring diversity and equal opportunity. As its longest-serving Director, he oversees a diverse staff responsible for administering and enforcing the New Jersey Family Leave Act and the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, guaranteeing equal opportunities in employment, housing and places of public accommodation without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, nationality, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or marital, familial domestic partnership or civil union status, or other characteristics. The New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, which was the nation's first statewide civil rights enforcement statute, is widely considered the strongest of its kind in the nation.

Director Vespa-Papaleo is recognized for issuing a groundbreaking legal decision involving student peer harassment (*L.W. v. Toms River Regional Schools*), developing the nation's first Disabilities & Public Accommodations Investigations Unit, which has dramatically enhanced accessibility for persons with hearing loss, vision loss, or mobility disabilities, and for utilizing the Division's broad powers to protect the rights of children of racial minorities (*Director v. Le Terrace Swim Club*), a class of female victims of sexual harassment (*Director v. City Coffee and Ronald Ford, Jr.*) and racial minorities who were victims of predatory lending (*Attorney General v. NPG, et al.*). Additionally, he has established cutting-edge community dialogue and staff leadership opportunities through the establishment of a Civil Rights Employer Advisory Council, the DCR Ambassadors Program, and the state's first-ever Civil Rights Diversity Initiative that has enhanced training, recruitment, promotion and retention of diverse staff, vendors, and community stakeholders.

Under his leadership, the Division received the "Public Service Commendation Award" by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, during a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Director Vespa-Papaleo was honored with the "Visionary Award" from Garden State Equality, the "D. Bennett Mazur Award" from the New Jersey Lesbian & Gay Coalition, and the State of New Jersey's "Teamwork Partnership Achievement Award" for improving polling place accessibility for voters with disabilities, and has been commended by the NJ Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Rutherford Hispanic Heritage Commission, the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies, the Gender Rights Advocacy Association of New Jersey, and the Islamic Center of Morris County. He is a frequent lecturer and author on topics of discrimination, family leave, diversity, and civil and human rights issues, and has presented at local and international conferences, seminars, and programs.

Mr. Vespa-Papaleo serves as Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights and was elected to the Board of Directors of the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies. He is also a member of the New Jersey Human Relations Council, the Commission on Bullying in Schools, and the Governor's Ethnic Advisory Council, and has served as a member of the New Jersey Disparities Study Commission. Additionally, he is on the Executive Board of the GLBT Rights and Labor and Employment Law Sections of the New Jersey State Bar Association. In June 2007 he was elected Chairman of the New Jersey Civil Union Review Commission, following his work on amending state law to provide legal protections for sexual and gender minorities.

Prior to his appointment as Director in 2002, Mr. Vespa-Papaleo worked in private practice in New Jersey, representing individuals and employers in the areas of labor and employment, election, and education law. Director Vespa-Papaleo is a member of the New Jersey State Bar Association, the Essex County Bar Association, the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, and the Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association. He has also participated in the Sidney Reitman Employment Law Inn of Court and is a 1999 Leadership New Jersey Fellow as well as a member of PRIMER. Director Vespa-Papaleo is a graduate of the FBI Citizens' Academy for the FBI's Newark District.

Born in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, Director Vespa-Papaleo became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1988. He received his degrees from Northwestern University and Boston University School of Law, and is a member of the bars of the United States Supreme Court, United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, New Jersey Supreme Court, and the District of Columbia. A resident of Bergen County, New Jersey, Mr. Vespa-Papaleo and his husband were married in California in June 2008.